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MORE WORDS ABOUT THE BIBLE

BY

JAMES S. BUSH

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WOMAN'S PLACE TO-DAY.

Four lectures in reply to the Lenten lectures on "Woman," by the Rev. Morgan Dix, D.D., of Trinity Church, New York.

By Lillie Devereux Blake.

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Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake last evening entertained an audience that filled Frobisher's Hall, in East Fourteenth Street, by a witty and sarcastic handling of the recent Lenten talk of the Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix on the follies of women of society.—*New York Times.*

Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake is a very eloquent lady, and a thorn in the side of the Rev. Dr. Dix, and gentlemen who, like him, presume to say that woman is not man's equal, if not his superior. Mrs. Blake in her reply to Dr. Dix's recent lecture upon "Divorce," made some interesting remarks upon the sex to which she has the honor to belong.—*New York Commercial Advertiser.*

There is no denying that Mrs. Blake has, spartan-like, stood as a break-water to the surging flood Rector Dix has cast upon the so-called weaker sex with the hope of engulfing it. It is sad to see a gentleman in the position Dr. Dix occupies setting himself deliberately at work to not only bring reproach upon the female sex, but to make us all look with comtempt upon our mothers and sisters. And the worst of his case is that he has shown that spirit in the male part of mankind, which is not at all creditable to it, of depreciating the intellect, the judgment, the ability and the capability of the female sex in order to elevate to a higher plane the male sex. According to Dr. Dix the world would be better were there no more female children born. And he makes this argument in the face of the fact that there would be "hell upon earth" were it not for the influence of women, and such women as Mrs. Lillie Devereux Blake, especially.—*Albany Sunday Press.*

Mrs. Blake's was the most interesting and spicy speech of the evening. She was in a sparkling mood and hit at everything and everybody that came to her mind.—*The Evening Telegram. N. Y.*

A stately lily of a woman, with delicate features, a pair of great gray eyes that dilate as she speaks till they light her whole face like two great soft stars.—*The Independent. N. Y.*

* * * She advanced to the front of the platform, gesticulated gracefully and spoke vigorously, defiantly and without notes.—*New York Citizen.*

* * * a most eloquent and polished oration. The peroration was a grand burst of eloquence.—*Troy Times.*

Lillie Devereux Blake, blonde, brilliant, staccate, stylish, is a fluent speaker, of good platform presence, and argued wittily and well.—*Washington Post.*

There are very few speakers on the platform who have the brightness, vivacity and fluency of Lillie Devereux Blake.—*Albany Sunday Press.*

She is an easy, graceful speaker, and wide-awake withal, bringing our frequent applause.—*Hartford Times.*

Mrs. Blake's address was forcible and eloquent. The speaker was frequently interrupted by applause.—*New York Times.*

The most brilliant lady speaker in the city.—*New York Herald.*

Has the reputation of being the wittiest woman on the platform.—*San Antonio Express.*

Mrs. Blake, who has a most pleasing address, then spoke: a strong vein of sarcasm, wit and humor pervaded the lady's remarks.—*Poughkeepsie News.*

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MORE WORDS

ABOUT

THE BIBLE.

By

JAMES S. BUSH.

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PREFACE.

THE following sermons were not originally prepared for publication. The first three were delivered in the ordinary course of pulpit instruction in a country parish. It will be seen that they are not addressed to scholars familiar with biblical criticism, but to persons of the average popular intelligence, religiously instructed, and not wholly unacquainted with the difficulties which attend the reading of Scripture, under the influence of modern thought, so called. The writer has had the satisfaction of learning that they have afforded some help to a number of those who listened to them. The motive to their publication now, is the desire to meet still further a want, long felt to be urgent, among Christian people. This want, indeed, has been already met, in many minds, with signal ability, by Mr. Heber Newton's more elaborate and connected

discourses. But the writer believes that it is made still more imperative in its demands upon the clergy, who approve in the main Mr. Newton's teaching, by the mistaken criticism, and unkindly spirit, which, in some quarters, the publication of his sermons has evoked. The time is coming when censure will be silenced by grateful acknowledgment of the timely service he has rendered to those who desire to read the Bible intelligently. It so happened that the first discourse in the present series was delivered on the very day on which the first of Mr. Newton's was preached—having been prepared for the 2d Sunday in Advent, 1882. The two following discourses were delivered severally on the same day, commonly called Bible Sunday, in the two years preceding. Except a few of the closing paragraphs in the third, they are printed substantially as they were delivered.

The critical reader, it is hoped, will pardon a repetition, which, perhaps, may help to deepen the impression the writer desires to make upon others. His excuse for some defects, beside, of which he is well aware, has been the wish to send them to the press with as little delay as possible; no time being allowed for a careful rewriting.

The writer begs leave here to renew his assent to the authority of God's Word in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and to declare his belief in them both, as a Divine revelation, "containing all

things necessary to salvation." Whatever change his opinions have undergone, his conviction of the binding nature of the assent and declaration made in the beginning of his ministry, remains the same. Otherwise he would renounce that ministry at once.

But while conscientiously recognizing the authority of the Church at whose altars he continues to serve, he affirms, also, his right to interpret the Scriptures in the light that human knowledge, and the promised illumination by the Spirit of Truth, shall at all times throw upon them. By the help and guidance of that Spirit, he will teach, as he best can, the word of truth to others.

JAMES S. BUSH.

WEST NEW BRIGHTON,
Staten Island, May, 1883.

I.

"Understandest Thou what Thou Readest?"

MORE WORDS ABOUT THE BIBLE.

"UNDERSTANDEST THOU WHAT THOU READEST?"—ACTS VIII., 30.

IT is one of the marvels of history, that the ancient literature of the Jewish people should have entered so largely into the civilization of the Western world, while the place of the people themselves has been one of ignominy and contempt. A still greater marvel is, the power of those other Scriptures—Jewish also in their origin—to form the belief and direct the thought of modern nations. These writings of a despised people are bound together in a volume which we call the Bible—the Book, first of all in the veneration and reverence of Christendom.

It is thought by not a few that this reverence is declining; that the more intelligent criticism to which the Book is now subjected, will lessen the popular estimate of its value; and, therefore, that the place which it has hitherto held cannot be a permanent one. If the sale of the Book be any criterion of the popular appreciation of it, then, the proof of any falling off in this would seem to be wanting. Probably no book in the world has met with any approach to the demand, among English speaking people, for the late revised translation. Certainly this demand is an indication of the very deep and widespread interest with which the Book is still regarded. It is not conclusive, however, against any possible change of opinion respecting the Bible. Many people were curious to see how the new version would differ from the old. But curiosity is not a sufficient motive to a patient comparison of the two. The demand, also, was enlarged by the very natural feeling that every Protestant family must have a copy. And this, when obtained, after a little time was laid away with the old Bible, to be used

on occasion. Of the multitude of purchasers, only a small proportion have become readers, studious and intelligent.

Whether the Bible, as a whole, is more generally, or more carefully, studied by Christian people now than in former times, it is difficult to tell. So far as my own observation extends, the popular knowledge of its contents is exceedingly limited and superficial. It was far more thorough, under the religious training of the Scottish Covenanters and the English Puritans. It entered into the religious education of New Englanders half a century ago, much more than it does now. The preaching of that day was more expository than it is now, presuming, also, upon greater familiarity with the books of Scripture.

At the same time, it must be apparent to any careful observer, that while the traditional reverence for the Bible has for the most part been preserved in the churches, a gradual change is taking place in the understanding and opinions of men respecting its contents. The critical study of it has not been without its effect, among intelligent people, of exposing

the error of current popular ideas of inspiration; and directing a closer attention to the true secret of its power over the hearts of men. For it cannot be denied that there is something in the Book which still keeps it in the forefront of human interest and inquiry. It never could have taken the place which it has held through so many ages, but for the evidence in its pages of a truth appealing more powerfully than any other to the affections, the hopes, and the best interests of mankind.

And this, also, is the proof of its divine inspiration. It is the Book in which a religious faith has always discerned the Word of God, addressing itself directly to the heart and conscience, furnishing the best rule of human life, the most exalted type of human character, the strongest incentives to virtue. This is why it has been a civilizing book, notwithstanding the proofs which it also gives of its origin among a people semi-barbarous through the greater part of its history. It has always held up a standard of morals above the people—a worship of Deity, ever inspiring them to higher and worthier ideas of duty.

Nor is the Bible any the less the book of inspiration to-day. The ideal of our humanity is enshrined within its pages; there it is, that God speaks to us of Himself—the Highest, Holiest ONE—worthiest of our adoration and our love. The time never can come when men shall cease to find this truth in the Bible; and this shall be the abiding testimony to the Divine Spirit which speaks to us through its pages.

But it may be said that this is not all we find in the Bible; some of the deeds which it commends, or tacitly approves, were barbarous—as the selfish cunning of Jacob, the murder of Sisera by Jael, the sacrifice of Jepthah's daughter, the slaughter of captives in war, the indiscriminate massacre of men, women and children, as by the command of God. True, there are portions of its history which are thought to be fabulous; narratives of fact, impossible and incredible—the sun and moon standing still at the voice of man, animals gifted with human speech, fire losing its property to burn, the order of nature arrested. When the mind is no longer credulous of the literal truth

of such narratives as these, what becomes of its faith?

The question would be a puzzling one, if belief and faith were one and the same thing. But the truth is, faith is the discernment of the spiritual truth in the Bible, which I have spoken of, as the true secret of its power at all times over the hearts and consciences of men. This truth is quite independent of very much in the letter of Scripture, to which a man may either give or withhold a mere intellectual assent. One may doubt whether God actually wrote with his own hand the ten commandments on two tables of stone; but he may have the faith to see the Divine wisdom of the Decalogue, and to obey its precepts. One may doubt whether a snake actually talked with our mother Eve, and persuaded her to eat the forbidden apple; but he may see how truly the story tells of his own temptation, stifling the voice of conscience in yielding to the solicitations of lust. One may doubt whether God actually commanded the sacrifice of Isaac; but he may have the faith to discern the noble life and character of Abraham.

A true religious faith will never fail to find in the Bible, and in every part of it, the truth which has the power to influence the life and the character for good. It is this which attests its inspiration, and gives it a value above all other books. There is no book, beside, that contains so much of the Word of God; not that each word in the Bible, made up of so many letters, *is* a word of God, spoken or written by Divine dictation, as one man would dictate to an amanuensis. On the contrary, each word in the Bible is the word of frail and fallible man, spoken and written as men may speak and write to-day in the exercise of their human faculties of memory, attention, imagination, or under the influence of feelings and impulses, convictions and perceptions, more or less extraordinary; and because each word is the word of man, there may be something of human imperfection in it.

Therefore, if in reading the Bible critically, here and there a mistake, or a verbal inaccuracy shall be found; or if we discover that the writer betrays some ignorance of natural phenomena, as made known through the science

of to-day; or if good men give utterance sometimes to thoughts unworthy, as it seems to us, of God, or below the highest standard of morals, we may not conclude that its claim to Divine inspiration is unfounded. For, with all its literal and verbal imperfections, it contains the Word of God, *i. e.*, the Wisdom of God revealed to man, for the guidance of human life. More than this, in its biographies of good men, and especially in the life of Jesus, it tells how the Word, or Wisdom of God, is incarnated in our humanity. Historically, therefore, it has a value beyond that of any other history.

Now, because it *contains* the Word of God, we say, very truly, that the Bible is inspired. Holy men spake and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. They were moved or inspired to tell of the Word, or the Wisdom of God; and the degree in which each part of the Bible is found to contain that wisdom, is the measure of its inspiration. Therefore, we may say that some parts of the Bible are more inspired than others. We find more of the Divine, and less of the human, in them, than elsewhere; for we must not forget that the

treasure of Divine wisdom was committed to earthen vessels. Though the writers were holy men, they were not perfect; though they were enlightened, they were not wholly exempt from error; though inspired, they were not infallible.

You will see from what has been said, the necessity often insisted upon here, of distinguishing the spirit of Scripture from the letter. In the letter, which is human, there may be error; or, if it be true itself, there may be error in the understanding, or the application of it. But the spirit, or inspired wisdom which it contains, is divine. When we are sure of discerning that, then we may know that we have the truth which the writers were moved by the Holy Ghost to teach.

In surrendering the claim of Scripture to a verbal inspiration, we might seem to lessen our respect for its divine authority. Once admit that there can be any doubt of the literal truth of all its narratives, we can no longer read it with an implicit confidence, as the absolute and infallible Word of God. This is quite true. But when we come to see how it is, that God does speak to us by His spirit, through all

these voices, and in all these narratives, notwithstanding the errors and imperfections of the human agents whom He employed, we shall have a much more stable ground for our confidence. It is because the belief of many persons, in these days, is shaken by much that is truly said about the Bible by unbelievers, that the need has become imperative of giving up a claim that cannot be made good, and urging another that can never be invalidated.

I speak in the interest of a surer belief, a truer knowledge of the Scripture itself, and a profounder reverence for the Word of God. For of what value, after all, is a belief in the Bible that depends upon a false theory of inspiration? If a man tell me he gives up his belief because he thinks the criticisms of such men as Mr. Ingersoll are just, and he cannot credit the story of the whale swallowing Jonah, and the iron swimming in the water, and many other marvels, then it is plain that the wisdom of which the Bible is full has escaped him altogether. He has not begun to understand its teaching of righteousness and judgment, of faith, and hope, and charity.

The Bible does no good to one who does not read it understandingly, *i. e.*, with an understanding heart, to discern the main current of spiritual truth that runs through it from first to last. All Scripture was written to teach this kind of truth; as Paul says, it is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Any one who reads it in the right spirit, will find this purpose underlying and pervading the whole of it; even in those portions most open to criticism. Everywhere it shows how men were seeking to know and to do the right thing, and how, amid innumerable ignorances, and temptations, and difficulties, they were gradually led on toward the way, and the truth, and the life of Christ. The same spirit which inspired the Scriptures will give us the understanding to discover in them this their divine purpose and meaning. For the Spirit of the Lord giveth understanding. While we shall not be disturbed by anything false, we shall not fear to own the truth of whatever may be truly said, even by those who are most hostile in their unbelief. The worst that is said of the Bible will have no other effect in

the end, than to turn the attention of good men all the more, to the real secret of its power by which, alone, its claim is made good to divine inspiration. Let us beware how we make any other claim for it than this. Said the greatest of English divines: * "*Whatsoever is spoken of God, or of things pertaining to God, otherwise than as the truth is; though it seem an honor, is an injury. And, as incredible praises given unto men, do often abate, and impair the credit of their deserved commendation; so we must, likewise, take great heed, lest in attributing unto Scripture more than it can have, the incredibility of that, do cause even those things which indeed it hath most abundantly, to be less reverently esteemed.*"

* Hooker's Ec. Pol. Lib. II.

II.

Living by the Word of God.

II.

LIVING BY THE WORD OF GOD

It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. —St. Matt., iv., 4.

"It is written." Jesus meets the devil with Scripture. The devil, in turn, assails Jesus with Scripture. He, too, can say "It is written." And from that time to this the Scripture has been used in the interests alike of truth and of error. There is nothing morally good that good men do not find an approval of in its pages; and there is much beside, which misguided and evil-minded men have made the occasion of scoffing and ridicule. Why this difference in the use and understanding of Scripture? Is it

owing to some defect in the Scripture itself? or is the defect in the minds of those who read it? Was the weapon that Jesus wielded the same with the one with which He was assailed? and can the words of Holy Writ be bandied back and forth, and made to contradict each other, so as to destroy altogether its authority. Or is there a right way of reading it and a wrong way?

The difference between the devil's use of it and Jesus', was just this: In the hands of Jesus it was the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In the hands of the devil it was the letter which killeth. The difference is the same among those who use it now. One reads with an understanding heart, and a discerning spirit; to see the true, and the good, and the beautiful; to make it his own; to feed and nourish the conscious life within. Another reads it with an evil eye of unbelief; either hating the truth or indifferent to it, or it may be blinded to the light of it. With one it has an authority, because of the truth which it carries at once to a mind wedded to good affections. It is God's word, not merely because it is written, but be-

cause it is true; and what he sees to be true, he can no more deny than he can deny the reality of what he sees with his bodily eye.

Another denies its divine authority, because in some portion of its contents he finds, or thinks he finds, the evidence of human error and imperfection; and there, on the surface of the letter, which the hand of man has traced, he sticks, and doubts, and cavils, and rejects. Because the meaning of Scripture is often veiled in figures, and sometimes clouded in mystery, and the light is dimmed by human infirmity (for the light of heaven must ever come through a medium that is earthly), he will close his eyes against it, and deny that the sun is shining.

How idle it would be now, to turn aside from the truth in those words which Jesus used, about living by the Word of God, to inquire whether the temptation, as narrated in Scripture, occurred actually in a personal interview between him and the devil; and then, if we could not believe in a personal devil, nor accept the details of the narrative, in their very letter, to reject the whole as a fable! Is it not much the wiser way, to study the meaning of those

words, and inquire if there be not some truth in them which we can take to ourselves?

I freely admit that there is much in the Bible that is of no earthly use whatever on the mere casual and careless reading of it; and much, too, that we shall only stumble at and puzzle our minds over in vain, if we read only in a curious and critical spirit. But if we make the Scriptures our study, to know and to live the truth in them, in the spirit of the prayer which we offer to-day,* then we shall find them to be, in very deed, the Word of the living God. In this spirit, then, let us try, by God's help, to discover the meaning of our text: "*It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*"

What does Jesus mean by *living*, by the

* *Collect for the Second Sunday in Advent.*—Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us, in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Word of God? He is quoting the words of Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy—viii., 3. It is a chapter in the history of Israel, in which Moses is reminding the people of the various providences by which the Lord had been leading them through the wilderness. "Thou shalt remember," he says, "all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness; to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord, doth man live."

All these providences of God, then, to Israel, all these experiences of life in the wilderness, the trials they had borne, the privations they had suffered, the humbling of their pride, the severe tests of their obedience,—all these hard and unwelcome methods of discipline, no less than the blessings which attended them, were so many means of making known to men the

Word of God, by which, and according to which, they should live. Indeed, by these very means God was giving them their true life. His care was over them for the food and raiment they required, as it is over the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. For forty years they were sustained in a wonderful manner in the wilderness. At their desire He brought quails; and He filled them with the bread of heaven. He opened the rock of stone, and the waters flowed out, so that rivers ran in the dry places."

But another life was theirs than that of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and His care was over that. His Word, by which He is ever speaking in nature, and by which the natural life is sustained, is also spoken in the law of their spiritual life. By all the dispensations of His providence, whether of good or ill, He is nourishing and developing that life in His people. And the great lesson that he was teaching Israel in the wilderness, and all through the vicissitudes of their good and evil fortune, was the one which Moses declared—that they should live not by bread only, even if it rained down as manna from the heavens, and

could be had without the labor of their own hands, but by every word that God should speak to them; by the things which they suffered, as well as by the things which they enjoyed; by their wants, no less than by the supply of their wants; by the punishment of their sins, no less than by the rewards of their obedience; by the consequences of their mistakes and their follies, and their ignorances, no less than by the more welcome tokens of the goodness and loving kindness of their God.

The voice of God never comes but from the heart of love. But it must needs come to His people sometimes in tones of rebuke, and reproof, and of warning. "Thou shalt consider in thine heart, that as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee." And to what end this discipline? That he might humble thee, and prove thee, to do the good at thy latter end."

Even so God speaks to his people to-day, and always; by the manifold experiences both of blessing and of chastening. There are various graces which enter into the spiritual life most precious in the sight of God. We need that

His Word shall come to us by means best fitted to cherish, and develop these. If our wills were never crossed, and our wishes always gratified, in the pride of our hearts we might forget the good Giver of all earthly blessings. We need, therefore, as Israel did, to be humbled. And God is constantly reminding us, in one way or another, of the uncertain tenure by which these blessings are held. It is not enough that we read of what He would tell us in His written word. We need to hear his voice directly speaking to ourselves. And he does speak to us often very plainly, in a way most humbling to the pride of life—by His afflicting providences, in sickness or death, in the loss of property or friends,—in whatever we suffer, by our own fault, or the fault of others.

There is the grace of patience, too. How would this be wanting, if there were nothing in life to try it? How could we learn to bear the cross with the Master, and know of the love whereof it tells, if the cross were never laid upon ourselves? We certainly should not assume it willingly, in the forms best fitted for the perfecting of our spiritual life.

There are artificial forms of self-denial which misguided souls have sometimes used; but, I think the Word of God comes to us most in those duties and trials, by which He is ever exercising the patience and loving kindness of His saints.

Jesus pronounces a benediction upon the merciful. And how shall the grace of mercy be ours, unless, in the providence of God, the occasions of mercy shall sometimes arise before us: nay, more than that, unless the Word of God shall remind us that we are the objects of *His* mercy, and that we are to be merciful, even as our Father in Heaven is merciful. Wonderful, indeed, is the fact, that the world's injustice and cruelty should have given the spectacle of divine mercy and compassion in the cross of Christ. And shall not the Word of God, that tells of that tender mercy come to us in every sight of the pain and wretchedness that sin has brought into the world?

That was a grand development of physical and intellectual life among the ancient Greeks and Romans. But the grace of mercy was wanting. The grace and truth which came by

Jesus Christ have met that want, in the higher type of human life and character which we call Christian. For in every form of suffering now known to the world, we hear the voice of God, not only pleading in pity, by the sympathy which fills our hearts, but commanding by the behests of duty in the conscience, to mitigate that suffering, and remove, so far as possible, the causes of it.

May I not speak of the Christian's hope, as a part of that higher life which comes to us by the Word of God? If we had all that the heart could wish in the present hour; if the soul were satisfied by the things we see, then were this our natural life complete. We should need to be cheered by no vision of faith—no hope of the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But there is a Word of God that comes to our ears, and tells us of good things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard. The joys of earth are but the shadows of an eternal substance. This belief of ours in a life beyond the grave, and these hopes and aspirations after it, are themselves the Word of God, assuring us of its reality. We should not

understand the written word that tells about them, unless there were a voice within, which answers to that word, and which the Spirit gives to confirm it. All the means we use to increase our faith, and nourish our hope—the word that is preached to us, the thoughts that are stirred within us, by what we hear and what we read, these are God's Word, to nourish the hidden life.

Herein lies in great part the value of the Scriptures to us; that beside the revelation they convey concerning God, and the life eternal, they are the record of the means which God has employed in times past to impart of that life to His people. We see how good men have lived before us; we have the examples of their faith and love, their patience and hopg. As the Apostle says in the Epistle: "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning; that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." We see by what discipline, and by what knowledge, the hidden life of the Spirit was nourished in the saints of old; and we are encouraged to believe that by the like process

it will be nourished now, and in all the days to come.

The Bible is most precious to us, as containing the fullest account in the world of the spiritual culture of the race—not the only account, because all history furnishes materials for the same knowledge. But it tells more fully and more truly how God comes into contact with His people, and speaks to them, as it were, face to face; and how that word has been profitable to them for teaching, and reproof, and instruction in righteousness. This was said by the Apostle, of the Old Testament Scriptures. They witnessed (as the word Testament means,) of God, and of eternal life, though far less perfectly than do the Scriptures of the New, which convey the knowledge of that life in Jesus Christ.

But in our reverence for the Book which contains the record of what God has spoken in times gone by, let us not think that He has ceased to speak to His people, and that we have no need that He should continue to speak to us now. His word must come to us as in times past, by all His various providences, and by the

manifold experiences which befall us. We should have wrong thoughts of Him, as the living God, if we did not believe this; and wrong thoughts of the life that comes from Him, if we did not think how it is generated, and nourished, and developed by the Divine Spirit, in and through the events of our natural life.

It was this faith which sustained Jesus in the hour of His temptation, and no less in the hour of His want, and His sorrow. He was in the wilderness; but God would feed Him without a miracle. He would wait patiently for the word of duty. For the word of comfort, and consolation, and hope, should come with it, and in the strength of that bread from Heaven, He would finish the work that His Father gave Him to do. And the life that was His from the Father, He would give to them that believed in His Name. For he would give Himself for the life of the world: "And if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever."

III

How to Read the Bible.

III.

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE.

"Blessed are your eyes, for they see."—MATT. XIII., 16.*

How shall we read the Bible? In one of the celebrated "Essays and Reviews," published some twenty years ago in England, the writer† says: "The Bible is to be read like any other book." This is true, in respect of the mere intellectual judgment to be passed upon its contents. But we find that persons of equal intellect understand the Bible very differently, and are variously affected by what they read.

One sees in its pages the manifest proofs of divine wisdom; another, the evidences of priestly imposture. The religious faith of one

* Preached on the 2d Sunday in Advent, 1880.

† Prof. Jowett.

is quickened as he reads, and the spirit of devotion stirred within him. In the mind of another, the Scriptures are the subject of a cold and cynical criticism.

Now, it is quite true, that persons equally gifted with intellect may differ in their judgment of any book. But there is no book in the world, in the estimate of which, the two extremes of reverence and atheistic scorn have met, as they have met upon the Bible. Nor does the difference arise altogether from a traditional respect for authority, on the one side, and a jealous concern for intellectual freedom, on the other. There is that in the Book itself, the presence of which is discovered by some minds as it is not by others—something which requires, for the apprehension of it, a gift quite distinct from any that we call intellectual. This peculiar characteristic of the Book itself is known among religious people as *inspiration.*

It is believed that good men, at various times, have spoken and written as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and that the gift of the same Spirit is bestowed for the right under-

standing of their recorded words. This is the Scripture doctrine of inspiration. The gift itself to the sacred writers is not defined; neither is it limited in time. Its presence is attested, in some of the Scriptures, in a much higher degree than in others. In determining the Canon of Scripture, the Christian Church passes its judgment upon the books most worthy to be received as inspired; not denying inspiration, however, to others, nor declaring that holy men have ceased to speak as they are moved by the Holy Ghost.

The sayings of Jesus bear witness to a Divine Spirit of wisdom, above all others. They have been listened to, for many centuries, with reverent interest, as to the very Word of God, by which, more fully than by any other sayings, the mind of God has been revealed. Yet men have greatly differed in their understanding of them. To those who had eyes to see, and ears to hear, His parables were beautiful illustrations of spiritual truth. To others, they were enigmas, unintelligible and confusing. Nicodemus, a master in Israel, was blind to the meaning of the new birth by the Spirit. The

woman of Samaria understood Him not, when He told of the living water that He could give to her to drink. Nor could some of His disciples see the truth in those other words of Jesus: "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." It was a hard saying: "Who can hear it?" Jesus answers: "The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life."

It may seem strange to those who have been long familiar with the words of Jesus, that His meaning should have been so grossly misconceived. To many, indeed, the whole story of the blindness of His hearers seems incredible. It has been made the ground of much hostile criticism, especially directed against the Gospel of St. John. But multitudes to-day, are hardly less blind in the hearing and reading of His recorded words. Many who reverence the letter of them, discern not the live-giving spirit which they enfold. None the less strange, are the materializing notions of the flesh and blood of Jesus, to which ecclesiastics tenaciously cling, as to the very substance of Christian

doctrine. Blind to the truth itself, they do not see how fatal these traditions are to a spiritual faith; nor the occasion they give to the sneers and scoffs of unbelief.

It is in the like failure to discern the spirit of Scripture teaching, and the misapprehension of its entire scope and substance, that men seek to discredit its truth as the Word of God. There is much, it is said, in the Old Testament, having the sanction of Divine command, which shocks the moral sense of our own time. It is not seen, how, in the worship of Jehovah, Israel was but slowly approaching a more worthy conception of the One true God; how the revelation of Himself to the darkened hearts of men was of necessity an imperfect one, fitted to the mental and social conditions of the time.

The Word of God in Scripture does not lie everywhere on the surface, to be picked up by every passer-by. It must be sought for as for hid treasure. One must needs be taught of the Spirit to trace the golden threads through the warp and woof of poetry and legend, myth and history, vision and prophecy, in which they are interwoven. Neither a blind bibliolatry, nor a

scornful criticism, will discover the truth which God therein reveals. It is for him who inclines his ear to wisdom, and his heart to understanding.

There is nothing to fear from a criticism of the Bible that is reverent and sincere. The time demands it. The growing intelligence of the people requires it, at the hands of those who claim to be their teachers in religion. That blasphemy like Mr. Ingersoll's finds so large a hearing among honest men, is largely the fault of religious teachers themselves. The truth which he speaks must not be denied, that the truth to which he is blind may be brought more clearly into the light.

Nor will any wisdom of the world invalidate the authority of Scripture as a Divine revelation. It will only help, in the end, to enlighten the minds of men as to the true nature of that authority. The various methods of destructive criticism are constantly neutralizing each other; and out of them all, and over them all, a method of interpretation has arisen, which amply vindicates the claim of Scripture to a Divine inspiration—and with what result? The

blind reverence for the form in which the truth is conveyed, is exchanged for a spiritual discernment of the substance of the truth itself. This, we may well believe, is the special work of the Spirit of Truth which Jesus promised to His disciples. Ours is emphatically the dispensation of the Spirit; and if we believe, as we ought, in God, our faith also in the guiding presence of the Spirit of God, will not be wanting.

This faith will not cease to discern in the Bible the best Word of God for the spiritual culture of the human race, antiquated as it is in language, and telling of customs and manners, of thoughts and beliefs, quite foreign to our own. For, under this antique garb, we behold the same essential manhood as our own—the same living, throbbing heart of humanity, that beats in our own breasts to-day—the same conscious needs of our higher nature—the same faith in a righteous God—whose power is invoked on the side of all righteous endeavor. Its moral and spiritual truth is the one precious coin that passes current among all nations and through all time. THE WORD OF

God is stamped upon it. It is never debased, and its value never fluctuates. Its commandments are as needful to-day as in the days of Moses. They are as of binding authority in America, as they were in Judea.

We prize the literature of the ancient Greeks and Romans. It enters largely into our modern civilization; the culture of our day would be very imperfect without it. But the ethical element derived from the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, that makes our civilization distinctively Christian, is incomparably more precious than any other.

We test the value of a work of genius by the measure of truth and of beauty, which it conveys to the human soul without distinction of race or of nation. Apply this test to the poetry of the Psalms, and the pure gold at once appears. It is as precious to-day, as when chanted of old on the hill of Zion. Jew and Gentile sing together its notes of praise to the great Jehovah; and its words, of sorrow and of longing, of gladness and of triumph, are still the fitting utterance of believing hearts throughout the world.

To prove the value of Scripture we need no theory of inspiration. We need not suppose that every syllable of it was dictated by the Holy Ghost; that there is not a verbal error, nor a chronological mistake in all its pages; and that we are bound to receive the letter of it all, as infallibly the Word of God.

Let me beg of you to dismiss from your minds at once, and forever, this mechanical theory of inspiration. It is a damage to the authority of Scripture itself as a Divine revelation. It is unworthy of your faith in God. If He had once given His word in this manner, He must also have provided that no possible mistake should be made in the transcribing and translating of it. Men spake in times past as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; but they spake in their own tongues, and in the exercise of their natural faculties, subject, of necessity, to human imperfection. They spake of the Infinite One, and truly, so far as it was given them to know. But their knowledge was confessedly limited. They spake, too, as men were prepared in heart and in mind to receive the truth. For this reason, many of the uttered

thoughts concerning God in the Old Testament, are addressed to a semi-barbarous people, incapable of the spiritual illumination of later times. The people that sat in darkness saw a great light; but they saw it distantly and dimly, as through clouds of ignorance and superstition.

Revealed truth, at the best, as it comes to us in the Gospel of Christ, is not absolute, but relative. We can know only in part. We cannot see now as we shall see. But as the ray divine beams into our souls, we are to welcome it, and walk in the light, longing and praying that our eyes may be opened more and more to its glory. "Blessed are your eyes, for they see." Unhappily, as in the days of Jesus, so now, there are those who, having eyes, see not the things which God reveals by the Spirit. They stick at the letter of Scripture, in the traditional belief, that the truth, and nothing but the truth, can always be found in this; or, rejecting its narratives as fabulous and false, they throw discredit upon the moral and spiritual teaching which they help to convey. The truth of Christ has been crucified

for near two thousand years between these two errors. Let us hope, that by the power of the Holy Ghost, a truer and more Spiritual Christianity, is arising and spreading itself throughout the world.

Very strange it seems, that men have been so slow of heart to enter into the spirit of the Master's teaching; that the same blindness which happened, in part, unto Israel, should have reappeared among His disciples. Caiaphas found his warrant in the Jewish law, for condemning Jesus to death. And Christians have justified, in like manner, the hanging of witches and the burning of heretics. The Mormon reads his Bible, and discovers there the rightfulness of polygamy, and the approval of assassination. By the letter of Scripture, the clergy of our land maintained, for many years, the Divine institution of slavery. An aged patriarch pronounces a curse upon his grandson, and this is alleged as the cause sufficient for transmitting that curse to his posterity forever.

That which especially constitutes the Divine character of Scripture, and authenticates it as a revelation of God, may not be discerned at all

by one most familiar with its pages. It is the natural man who reads, and not the spiritual. None more familiar with Scripture than the Scribes in the time of Jesus. But their minds were blinded by their interests, their prejudices, and their fears. "Even unto this day," said Paul, "the vail is upon their heart." They could find in the law of Moses, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. But they were blind to the law of love which Jesus discovered. What Moses allowed for the hardness of men's hearts, was plain enough; but the more perfect law of wedded life from the beginning, had escaped them. Cursing, as well as blessing, was in the letter; but they knew not the Spirit whereof Jesus enlightened them, when he said: "Bless, and curse not." "Search the Scriptures," said Jesus, again, to these blind guides, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me." They searched the Scriptures diligently, but they did not find in them eternal life—the true knowledge of God, and of His Christ. The Old Testament was full of the testimony of Jesus. It was the spirit of all prophecy; but it was not

revealed to them. A carnal Christ they could find, but not a Spiritual; a King to crush their enemies, and minister to their pride, but not a King to reign in righteousness; a Prince, exalted to the throne of David, but not a Prince anointed above his fellows by the Spirit of Holiness.

No; the suffering Christ of prophecy was not for them, nor an humble Christ, nor a poor Christ, though the Scriptures were full of the truth that the highest glory of humanity could be reached only through the ministry of suffering. And so it was, that when the King of Truth appeared, He was to them, as "a root out of a dry ground, with no form nor comeliness; and when they saw Him, there was no beauty that they should desire Him."

Alas! that words like these should be still fulfilled in an evil heart of unbelief. The Christ of prophecy, and the Christ of history, are alike rejected of men. Nor is it the unbelief of the world, so called, alone, that fails to receive the witness of the Spirit to the grace and truth of Christ in Holy Scripture. The vail has been upon the hearts of Christians

themselves. How else can we account for the persecuting spirit that has darkened the annals of the Christian Church? Is it not the standing proof of the blindness of the human heart, that the very followers of the loving Jesus should have persecuted, even unto death, their fellow disciples, and that, not for their misdeeds, but for their beliefs and opinions? Can there be a more signal perversion of the truth as it is in Jesus, that men of blameless life, faithfully teaching the truths which the Master uttered, and confessedly illustrating, both in word and deed, the Spirit of the Master Himself, should be branded as heretics, and driven out from the fellowship of their brethren in Christ?

No doubt, men have been sincere, in thus "driving away from the Church erroneous and strange doctrines;" as Saul was, in persecuting from city to city the unoffending Christians, verily believing that he was doing God's service. But a zeal so mistaken can hardly be numbered among those gifts of the Spirit which Jesus promised to His disciples. No. The King of Truth did not seek the triumph of His gospel of peace by means like this. He did not

call down the wrath of Heaven, which His disciples invoked upon the head of him who was casting out devils in His name, because he followed not with them. The Spirit of Jesus was a spirit of unity and brotherly love. He sought to bring together the outcasts of Israel, and the dispersed of Judah—to fulfil the prophetic vision of the day, "when Ephraim should not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim."

Surely in these days, the gifts of the Spirit are not to divide and antagonize the disciples of Christ. Paul tells of the diversity of gifts in the Christian Church. But all these, he says, "worketh that one and the selfsame spirit." And the end of this working is the edifying of the Body in love—the manifestation of the Spirit of Christ in the hearts and lives of its members. Let them differ in their modes of doing good—in their choice of religious teachers; this one preferring Paul, that one following Cephas, or Apollos; let them differ in their word of knowledge, in their views of religious truth, in the honest expression of their opinions; if, indeed, they are baptized into the

Spirit of Christ, they are His. Nor has He given authority to any Church on earth to cut off, or degrade from His ministry, a member of His Body, who is united to Him in spirit.

One may have wrong opinions about the Bible and its interpretation. It is the office of the Spirit of Truth to convince him of his error. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, the truth will be spoken in love. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, too, is liberty, that men may inquire for the truth freely, and speak it honestly as they discern it. One who holds it otherwise than in love, is more in error than he whose opinions, though erroneous, are held without a breach of charity.

"Blessed are your eyes, for they see." Unspeakably precious is the revelation of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. To the mind of Paul, it was a light shining out of darkness,—the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Now that the scales had fallen from his eyes, and the vision of faith was given him, he read the Scriptures as he had never read them before. The light was thrown back upon them, and he saw the

Spirit long hid beneath the letter. They were now full of Christ, and he would fain tear away the veil from the hearts of his countrymen, that they, too, might see with him, how the words of Moses, and of all the prophets, were fulfilled in Him, and His ministry of love.

Let it not be said that the spirit of Saul the persecutor, is still rife in the Christian Church, but, rather, the large-hearted spirit of Paul the Apostle. How, indeed, can the victory of the King of Truth be made complete, save by the speaking, and living the truth in love. Jesus will have lived in vain, and died in vain, if His followers shall fail to understand and act upon this, the method of His ministry. Nor will all the prayers of the Church avail for the coming of the Holy Ghost the Comforter, except as they invoke the Divine Spirit that was His, as for the guidance into all truth, so for the peaceful and loving union of all true hearts throughout the world: "*That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me.*"

IV.

The Spirit of Truth.

IV.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH

I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth.—St. John, xvi., 12 and 13.*

One who reads the sayings of Jesus attentively, will be struck with the variety of His discourse. His words are addressed to persons differing very widely in their powers of mental and spiritual apprehension. There is food for babes and strong meat for men. There are pearls of Divine wisdom, not to be cast before swine; and there are good things for common use, in the every day life of the believer. Simplicity and profundity go hand in hand; His parables conceal, at the same time, that they illustrate His meaning. He is speaking the truth for all men, and for all time. He is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and laying the foundations of an empire of spiritual

* Preached xvth Sunday after Trinity, 1879.

thought and spiritual life, into which the world of our humanity may be gathered. The salvation of all men was the burden of His teaching, but His doctrine had a secret of its own, to the knowledge of which His nearest disciples were but slowly and partially admitted. Not even to the inner circle, within which the mysteries of the Kingdom were disclosed, could the whole mind of the Master be made known. The time had not yet come. "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; howbeit, when He the Spirit of Truth is come, He will guide you into all truth."

And herein the teaching of Jesus is not singular. Everyone familiar with the education of children, or who recalls the processes of his own mental development, knows very well, how the truth, to be apprehended, must be suited to the various degrees, and the several stages in the growth of the understanding. The knowledge only of appearances comes first; the knowledge of unseen causes and hidden realities comes afterwards, and more slowly, and is never attained in its fulness.

So the human race has been educated from

the beginning by Infinite Wisdom, both in things temporal and things eternal. Jesus, whom the Christian faith identified, with this wisdom, revealed and personified, in the propagation of the truth which he received from the Father, is conscious of its limitations in his own personal ministry; He predicts the onward movement of spiritual illumination in the ages to follow. The "many things" which he reserved, were, no doubt, akin to the things which he said. The germ of all Christian doctrine, as developed afterwards in the Apostolic writings, is contained in the Evangelical narrative; but the truth, as recorded in both, should be still further unfolded by the Spirit to the mind and heart of Christian believers to the end of time. All that it was necessary for men to know, for the right conduct of life, with the conditions and the assurance of the life eternal; all that related to the maintenance and growth of the Kingdom of God on earth, the propagation of essential religious truth, and the overthrow of error, should be preserved and developed according to the exigencies of the Christian Church, and the ever changing atti-

tude of the world toward her. The religious truth which Jesus taught, should have, through the informing agency of the Divine Spirit, the power of adaptation to every mind, and every age—not, indeed, to the exclusion, but to the ultimate conquest of error; not to the possession of all knowledge, securing certitude and immunity from doubt; nor yet, relieving the individual mind from inquiry. Rather does the truth of which Jesus discoursed, impose the duty of inquiry. Men were to take heed how they heard, and how they understood his words. The possibility of misconception, and perversion of his meaning, should be theirs; much should be left for an ever-growing mental and spiritual apprehension, requiring, on the part of the disciple, a sincere love of the truth, and an earnest seeking after it. But these conditions met, the promise was given of all needful guidance by the Divine Spirit. Scripture itself should contain all things necessary to salvation, and for the rightful interpretation of Scripture, the gift of the Holy Ghost should ever be accorded to the faithful. No believer should perish for the lack of knowledge.

As the Gospel ministry was commissioned by our Lord to teach and disciple the nations, so it should be fully equipped and furnished with spiritual gifts for all its ministerial functions. Believers should be taught, that they might teach others through all time. The deposit of religious truth should be safe in their hands. They should be able to defend it against error and unbelief. They should bring it into accord with kindred truths, and adapt it, as to the wise and simple, so, also, to the varying conditions of human knowledge; even as Paul commended the Gospel to the wise and the unwise, the Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Barbarian. They should continue to teach and to preach forever to all nations, and to every creature, the unchangeable truths of the Gospel of Christ. The Divine afflatus, breathed upon his true disciples, should never be wanting. The inspiration of the Almighty, which in all ages hath given understanding, should never fail while the earth and the inhabitants thereof continued.

The promise of Christ, then, is fulfilled in the ministry of all disciples upon whom the

gift of teaching is conferred. But it is not confined to these. The promise is made to the whole body of the faithful, and to every believer in particular. All should be taught of the Holy Ghost, and all be led into the way of truth, in so far as that way should be identified with the way of life. Every seeker after the truth of God, and the wisdom of God, for the life which now is, and that which is to come, should find the treasure which he sought. Such, unquestionably, is the meaning of the Saviour's promise to His disciples. We cannot limit it to any class or order of men. The Kingdom of Heaven is open to all believers, and the Spirit of Truth, that shall guide to an entrance therein, and the possession of its treasures of wisdom and knowledge according to the measure of his capacity, is denied to none. Such is the promise! Do we believe it? And have we any evidence in human experience upon which our faith may rest? In the inquiry of the soul concerning the realities which lie beyond the domain of things known and demonstrable, in the mazes of speculation, through which the human mind is ever wander-

ing, have we any security against essential error, any guaranty that the treasure of Divine Truth shall be our's with increasing fulness?

The world is full of books upon religious subjects. An almost countless host of men have no other occupation than the teaching of religious beliefs. If they were all agreed in what they teach, there would be a presumption of truth but little short of certainty, in such teaching. But instead of agreement, we find diversity. There are different religions, each asserting its superior claim to the possession of truth. The Christian Church itself is divided into a multitude of sects, differing very widely among themselves in doctrine. What criterion of truth is furnished us? What test of the validity of these opposing claims? The appeal might be made to the Bible. But Christians differ in their interpretation of that. Or it might be made to some living visible authority. The Roman Catholic abides by the infallible declarations of the Pope; but the Protestant will not credit the fact of Papal infallibility. The Anglo-Catholic submits his judgment to the voice of the Church; but the

visible Church herself is a body of frail and fallible men. The authority to teach with which her ministry is invested does not carry with it exemption from error. She is a witness and keeper of the truth, but every page of her history attests the imperfection of her knowledge. She is the *Ecclesia docens* only as she submits herself to be taught by the Holy Ghost. Where her demand of submission is most urgent, there the living representatives of her authority are the least to be trusted. We see, then, that a condition of absolute immunity from error is impossible. All history is a record of the conflict between truth and error, as between good and evil. Now, it is through this conflict that knowledge is increased and wisdom imparted. The human race has unquestionably made no small gains in both. But how have these gains been secured? First, I should say, by the transmission of knowledge and wisdom from one age and generation to another, each one adding its own tribute, and its own conquests, to the stock received. But suppose the people in one age of the Church, or the world, should say "there is no truth to be

desired except that which they have received from their fathers. They are content with that; they have nothing to add to it by their own labor or inquiry." Would it not be, under the cover of humility and reverence for the past, an assertion of their own freedom from error, an avowal of an indolence, and indifference, and want of faith, fatal to the truth itself, as a living, growing power in the world?

Or suppose, on the other hand, it should be said, that "the traditions of the past are worthless; that we have only to profit by its errors and follies. The only knowledge worth having, must be of our own seeking and our own getting." Is an attitude of self-sufficiency like this, the one most favorable to the increase of knowledge, or the growth in wisdom? It will be found that the conquests of truth, with all life, and growth, and progress in the knowledge of it, have been made only where the two principles of *respect for authority*, and *freedom of inquiry*, have been jointly operative. The civilization of our own day is the product both of ancient and modern thought. The truth of Christianity is the testimony of believers in

every age, all speaking as the Spirit gives them utterance. To imagine God as no longer active in creation, were an unworthy conception of Deity. None the more worthy of a Christian's faith is the thought of the Divine Spirit of of Wisdom, as ever ceasing to inspire His Church, or failing to fulfil the promise made to believers. If this promise be not the pledge to each, or to all, of a perfect knowledge, it is one on which the believer may rest in the secure possession of all that he is able to receive, and of all that is needful for his salvation. What more does he need to know, than that which he may learn from day to day by the teachings of the written and the preached Word of God, with the spirit of inquiry in which he himself may search, with all the helps of human learning, for its hidden treasures? Let him not *hope* to know the truth, if either of these means be neglected. Let him not *fear* that he shall be misled when both are employed together. "God helps them who help themselves." He teaches those who desire to be taught, and who will use as they best can, the privileges and faculties which He has bestowed. He has

given us the Bible, that we may study it; He has given us the teachings of the Church, that we may listen to them, and ponder them in our hearts; He has given us understanding and reason, that they may be exercised in the way of Wisdom; and in various measure, He has given, and has pledged in yet fuller measure, the guidance of His Spirit into all truth. Shall we fear to trust him for the result? Shall we presume to limit Him in the exercise of His enlightning power through the ages to come?

If you ask me what guaranty we have that we shall be led into the way of truth, I answer that we have the character of God himself; the confidence of a reasonable faith in an all-wise and all-loving Father. We have the witness of our own spirits to the truth which Jesus declared to His Disciples. We have the sure word of prophecy in Scripture, whereunto we do well that we take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place. We have evidence beside, that God is leading his people, even through the wilderness of doubts and fears through which they have been wandering. We have it in the history of His ancient people

He was leading them, and teaching them from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses and all the prophets, even unto Christ. Shall we infer that he was not leading them because they sometimes went astray, and their knowledge was imperfect, and, even their teachers, were sometimes in error? The law of Moses, itself, with all the light of prophesy thrown upon it, was imperfect; but was it any the less surely leading men to Christ?

We have proof, too, of the Divine guidance in the history of the Christian Church, with all its controversies, its false traditions, its corruptions. Her Apostles and Prophets, her noble army of martyrs, her sons and her daughters of saintly life, and consecrated gifts of wisdom, and learning, and piety—all are witnesses to the truth which she has transmitted from her Lord through the ages. The stream has indeed been made turbid by manifold errors and vain speculations, by human ignorance, and human frailty; but it is none the less the river of God—for its source is Divine—and the streams of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of our God.

Uncertainty there is about many things—ignorance of many more; but the promise is not that we should be as Gods, knowing all the truth. The Spirit is leading us on, step by step; and if, for the humbling of our pride, we are reminded that our footsteps are feeble, and our progress but slow, shall we, therefore, doubt of the power of the hand that is guiding us? Let us hold fast to that; and never doubt that both grace and truth shall be sufficient for us. Only, let us not be content with our ignorance, nor fall into a state of idle dependence upon guides that are only human. The promise is given of the Spirit. We need that always to enable us to distinguish the true from the false, the human from the Divine—that we, ourselves, may have the truth within us, as a well of life, the living fountain of wisdom and knowledge. We need the Spirit in the study of Scripture, in receiving the testimony of the Church, in all our reading, and thinking, and hearing, of what men believe to be true. And, if so be, that we desire what we need, and have the will to do, as well as to know, of the doctrine, it shall be ours, as surely as the Word of God

is true. Our prayer, so often made, shall be heard, and God, the Holy Ghost, shall enlighten us more and more with the light of the everlasting Gospel.

V.

The Word Made Flesh.

V.

THE WORD MADE FLESH.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.—St. John i., 1 and 14.

What did the writer mean by these words? The inquiring mind has sometimes been met by the answer, that the truth which they convey is an unfathomable mystery, embodied in the Church's creeds, and to be received with an implicit assent to her authority. An evasive answer like this will not satisfy the mind of any thoughtful reader of the Bible. It may appear only to hide the ignorance of one who makes it. The Words of Scripture were written to be understood, and not to be recited blindly and ignorantly.

For myself, I believe there is a meaning in these words of the Evangelist, which no mere formulary can interpret; which, however, every

spiritually minded Christian can receive,—a meaning, too, that will go far to meet some of the graver difficulties which arise, in thoughtful minds, under the teaching of modern science.

You will observe that the writer of them assumes the existence of such a Being as God. In this assumption, the leading teachers of science in our day are not at issue with him. Mr. Tyndall and Mr. Proctor, and, I think, Mr. Huxley, are at pains to assure the world that they are not atheists. The writer of the Gospel, however, teaches, that of the Being of God, we may *know* something; for that He has made a revelation of Himself to the mind of man. The Word of God, he says, was made of flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And here, he, and some of these men of science, part company. For they affirm that God is unknowable. They are not content with saying that we cannot know Him to perfection. They tell us that we cannot rationally conceive the Being of God, as an object of thoughtful reverence and love.

Now, I am very far from believing that many of those who use the term referred to are with-

out some faith in a Divine Being, derived partly from traditions not wholly surrendered, and partly from the knowledge which they have gained, of themselves, and the universe. Many who refuse to accept the thought of God in the popular theology, have their own conception of Deity, more or less vague, and in keeping with the repeated declaration of our imperfect knowledge of God, in Scripture. But the Being of God, once admitted, by whatsoever name He may be called—the Absolute, the Infinite, or even, the Nameless One,—it will be seen that the very thought of His Being must originate in what is believed to be some manifestation thereof to the human mind.

Our conception of any human being whom we have not seen, is found through some utterance of himself in word or deed. Michael Angelo speaks to us in St. Peter's; Raphael, in his Madonnas; Milton, in his poems; Beethoven, in his symphonies. We see in these works, the genius, *i. e.*, the mind and spirit of the men. Each one had his word to speak, his thought to utter; and that word, or that thought, reveals himself—nay, it *is* himself, to us.

Now, as it seems to me, it is just this which John means when he says that "the Word *was* God." The God in whom he believed, is the Being, who is heard, and seen, and known, in the uttered Word, or Thought, of Himself in the universe. The Greek term translated "word," means also "thought," or, rather, thought expressed. This thought of God is not in time only, but in eternity. For as we cannot think of God, as Himself without thought, and so, without action, therefore we cannot limit His thought, or activity, to the period of duration which we call time. Thus John says, "The Word was in the beginning with God;" so, also, the author of the Book of Genesis says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The words, "in the beginning," are, no doubt, used in the same sense by both writers. The work of creation was in the mind of God before the world was. The Word, or the Thought of God, is co-eternal with Himself, without beginning of days, or end of years.

Time, however, is a portion of eternity, as the finite is a part of the Infinite; and it is to this part and portion that our knowledge of God is

confined. The Word of God comes to us in what we see and know of creation—in what we see, and feel, and know, of ourselves, body, soul and spirit. It comes to us in human history, which is the development in time, of God's thought for the human race. Most of all, it comes to us in the highest type of human character. We learn something of the Supreme Intelligence, and the Supreme Will, from what we know of the intelligence and will of man. Even so of the Spirit of God, we may know, as Paul says, by the Spirit in ourselves, which is the gift of God. He speaks to us, albeit imperfectly, according to our limited and finite comprehension. The Divine Love and Wisdom are revealed, under the conditions of time. He speaks to us in the words and deeds of men—the wise and the good, who have appeared from time to time on the stage of the world's history—the sages, and prophets, and poets—the *seers* of His truth—the speakers of His word—the doers of His work. These are the inspired ones of earth. The poet is not the verse-maker, pleasing the ear with the jingle of his rnymes, but the soul that sees and interprets

the Word of God in nature and in human life.

To the prophets and poets of Israel there came the vision of the Word, in the reign of righteous kings; under the figure of earthly blessings, peace, prosperity, security of life, the overthrow of injustice, deliverance from captivity—the feast of fat things, the corn, the wine, and the oil—the cattle upon a thousand hills—the shelter from the storm—the quiet habitation; and all these but the shadow and symbol of the richer blessings that should come by the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Is it strange that the heart of faith should have sought some living representative of the Word of God, whose right to reign on earth as the King of men should indeed be Divine, established by a conquest wider than the extent of empires?

Now, if there be One, who has indeed appeared on earth—who represents in word and deed, more than all others, the wisdom of the ages; One who has borne to his race, as none beside, a message of Truth and Love—is it too much to say of Him, that "the Word of God was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of

grace and truth?" Here, then, in the Christ of history, is the Thought of God for our humanity, the Word in the mind of God, from Eternity, but expressed to us in time. "God, who in times past, hath spoken unto us by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by a Son."

Verily, the Christ, our Lord, is the God—man. The Divine and human meet in Him. He is the object in time, of our faith, our hope, and our love—One with the Father in Spirit. Who that looks upon the face of Jesus, as the writer of the fourth gospel did, can say that we know nothing of God? Or who will refuse to say with him, "No man hath seen God at any time—the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him."

It is plain that this writer, whoever he was, beheld in the life and teaching of Jesus the crowning glory of God's work in humanity. And this is our distinctive faith, as Christians, that we discern in the Christ of the gospel narrative, after all that may be separated from it, by a truthful criticism, the revelation of the mind and will of God to the human race.

We see in Christ, the reflection of the Divine love and wisdom. These we believe to be of the very essence, which forms the object of our highest worship. They tell us of what God *is*, and what God *means* to us. As the light and heat which radiate from the sun, tell us of what the sun is in its relation to our planet, the source of its teeming life and beauty, so Christ is the light of the world—the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person; not confounding Him with the Father, any more than the light of day is confounded with the sun, but proclaiming the unity of Christ in Spirit with the Father, as the unity of the co-eternal Word with God.

And herein lies the excellency of the gospel of Christ over all other revelations of God. We should err if we thought it the only revelation; for God has always been speaking to the mind and heart of man. It were an unworthy thought of God, to think of Him as ever ceasing to speak. His word has come to other good men than the writers of our own Scriptures; and there have been other prophets than those of the Hebrew and Christian peoples.

But in other religions, the rays of truth are feeble and scattered at the best; discolored, too, and distorted by a thousand superstitious fancies. In the gospel of Christ, the light shines out strong and clear, revealing the righteousness and holiness of God, yet with a radiance so mild, and a warmth so inspiring, that the coldest and most distant soul may be drawn into the way of life.

In Christ, God is Love; and Love knows no gift too precious, no sacrifice too dear, for its expression. The Good Shepherd comes to seek and to save that which is lost. He goeth into the wilderness for the one that is gone astray; He giveth His life for the sheep. In Christ, God is the Father, whose heart can never cease to yearn for His erring child. Living or dead, he is the child of His love. "For this, thy brother, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

This, dear friends, is the knowledge of God, of which John spake as the light that lighteth every man coming into the world. Now, for these eighteen hundred years and more, it has been to the souls of men a Divine image of

peace and salvation, borne as from the heart of God, to a sinning world, filling the soul of the believer with joy, and inspiring that soul to bear the glad tidings to others. "Good tidings of great joy," were brought as by the angels of God to the shepherds of Bethlehem. The angelic song has been echoed and re-echoed from heart to heart, through all the ages since, and shall never cease to be heard until the earth is filled with the knowledge and the love of God.

We speak of Jesus as Divine, and we speak truly; for as the revealed Thought of God in our humanity, He is "God of God, Light of Light," coming forth from the bosom of the Father, and bringing with Him the life and light from on high. But now we must not lose sight of the truth that Jesus was as really and perfectly human as we ourselves; "made of the seed of Abraham, according to the flesh." For it is only by the Spirit of Holiness, revealed in the human life of Christ, that we can see His divinity. The Word must be made flesh.

We see God partially in nature, His love in the gifts of His bounty, His wisdom and glory

in the wondrous structure and order of the universe. But He comes most nearly to our hearts in the Gospel of Christ—in His Divine sympathy with suffering—His tenderness to the fallen—His loving sacrifice of self—His witness to the truth—in the testing of His character by temptation and suffering—in the dignity and glory of His entire manhood. He was, indeed, the tried stone of the prophet, elect and precious, rejected by the builders, and made in Israel the stone of stumbling and rock of offence, but become at last the corner stone of the temple of God in Zion. To the Greek, also, seeking after wisdom other than divine, the cross of Christ was foolishness; but to the faith of His true disciples it has proved in all the ages since, the power of God, and the Wisdom of God.

The Christian faith, in itself the offspring of the highest reason in man, is made secure by the admitted facts in the life and ministry of Jesus.

"That which was from the beginning (in the mind of God) which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked

upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of life; that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly, our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ." This record of an eye witness, sustained by ample testimony beside, can be impeached by no denial or disproof of miracle. It abides, in the homage of the civilized world sincerely rendered to the God-like character of Jesus—in the eminence which that name maintains to-day among the saviours and teachers of the human race. In that life and ministry, we have God's thought to us—God's Word—God's message of grace and salvation.

Shall it be said, then, that we cannot know God? Then, the Word of God that is written, in the book of Nature, and on the page of human history, and blazoned in lines of living light in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is without a meaning; then, the story of Jesus, so sweet to the ear of childhood, so tender to the lowly and the fallen ones on earth, so eloquently responsive to the truest and noblest longings of the human heart, has been told in vain. There is

no beauty in the face of Jesus, that we should desire Him, no ear to listen to the music of those angelic voices singing "their carol of high praise," no voice to answer back to the heavens, the grateful acknowledgment of God's best gift to man.

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